

Mission San Xavier del Bac
Near Tucson, Pima County
Arizona (10 MILES FROM)

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Arizona

Historic American Buildings Survey
Henry F. Withey, District Officer
Los Angeles, California

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MISSION SAN XAVIER DEL BAC

Tucson Vicinity, Pima County, Arizona

Owner: The Catholic Church, administered by the National Catholic Council for Indian Churches.

Date of Erection: 1797.

Architect: Ignacio Gaona.

Builder: Pedro Bojourquez, under the direction of Franciscan Fathers.

Present Condition: Fair, extensive repair work done to church and convento in 1906 by Father Granjon of Tucson; new floors and roof added to convento, parapet and roof of church repaired, class rooms and cloister added to east wing of convento at north end, and numerous minor repairs. Excepting the repair work and additions noted above, the building is unchanged from its original appearance.

Number of Stories: Convento, one; mortuary chapel, one; church, one with choir loft; narthex, three, with belfries.

Materials of Construction: Foundations: stone; floors: pine in the church and mortuary chapel, cement in storage room, choir loft, belfry rooms and on the cloisters; oak and maple in the convento, (original floors were burned brick); exterior and interior walls: burned brick in church and mortuary chapel, adobe in convento; roofs: burned brick, vaulted, in church and mortuary chapel, with cement plaster topping; pitched roof of corrugated metal, standing seam metal and composition on wood construction over convento and cloisters (originally flat adobe on cotillo and saguaro strips (vigas) over mesquite logs (vigas); ceilings: molded and painted plaster in church; dressed and matched beaded boards in all rooms of convento, except in the superior's room, which has the vigas exposed; the original mesquite and saguaro ceilings are over the west and south cloisters; the new cloister on the east has ceiling of pine on frame construction.

Other Existing Records: Prent, Duell, "Mission Architecture as exemplified (sic) in San Xavier del Bac", Tucson, 1919; Hallenbeck, Cleve, "Spanish Missions of the old Southwest", New York, 1926; Forrest, Karle R., "Missions and Pueblos of the old Southwest", Volume 1, Cleveland, 1929; Frary, I. T. "Mission of San Xavier del Bac, near Tucson, Arizona", in Architectural Record, April, 1926, p.p. 376, 378; Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 464;

Bancroft, Hubert Howe - "History of the Pacific States of North America", Volume XII, "Arizona and New Mexico", 1530-1888, San Francisco, 1888; Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner, "The American Spirit in Architecture", (Vol. XIII of the Pageant of America); Bolton, Herbert E., (ed.) "Kino's Historical Memoirs of Pimeria Alta", Vols. I and II, Cleveland, 1919; Lookwood, F.C. - "Story of the Spanish Missions of the middle Southwest", (Santa Ana, California, 1934, p.p. 28-29; photographs: 5" x 7" copy of photograph of general view of main church (southwest elevation) taken by a Tucson photographer, name unknown, probably in the late 1860's, furnished by Mrs. J. H. Macia, Tombstone, Arizona, who has the original; four 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ " copies from negatives taken in 1887 and 1888 by Leo Goldschmidt, Tucson, Arizona, who now has the original negatives.

Additional Data: "On the barren lands of the Papago Indian Reservation, nine miles south of Tucson, stands San Xavier del Bac, generally considered by architects the most beautiful of all the Spanish Missions in what is now the United States, and one of the most completely preserved. Alone among these missions, it has clung to its original purpose, religious work among the Indians. It is the one most closely associated with Father Eusebio Francisco Kino 'the most picturesque missionary pioneer of all North America - explorer, astronomer, cartographer, mission builder, ranchman, cattle king, and defender of the frontier.' For a quarter of a century he was the most important figure on the Sonora-Arizona-California frontier. In 1700, under his direction, construction was begun on San Xavier del Bac Mission, which was located in what was then a fertile and well watered valley inhabited by thousands of Indians". Stauffer, Dr. A. P., of the research and survey section of the Branch of Historic Sites, National Park Service.

"Under the stimulus of the missionary activities of the padres, agriculture thrived, stock-raising was established, and many Indians were converted to Christianity. The mission reached its height in the period about 1790 to 1810. With secularization of the Missions in 1813, San Xavier became little more than a parish church. Ten years later, the priests were driven out because of their hostility to the newly established Mexican government. Not until 1857 did priests again come to San Xavier regularly. The present Mission was begun in 1785 and completed in 1797. Its style of architecture can be described as Moorish Mission. Architects believe that San Xavier is the only Spanish church within the United States in which an attempt was made to equal the lavishness of the baroque churches of Mexico. Built entirely of baked adobe brick covered with white plaster, the Mission is more nearly the original structure than any other in the United States. Restoration work was begun in 1906. This took the form chiefly of repairing and reinforcing weakened portions of the

building. On the whole, the restoration seems to have been a purely faithful one." Neasham, Aubrey, Regional Historian, Region III, National Park Service, Santa Fe, New Mexico, "Special Report on the Mision of San Xavier del Bac," January, 1940.

San Xavier cannot be classed as purely any one style. The exterior and portions of the interior of the church are a mixture of baroque and ohurriгуeresque. The lower half of the interior, with its glitter of gold, brilliant colors, frescoes and statuettes, partakes of the Byzantine, while the upper reflects the Moorish influence. The altars in design and execution are baroque.

The Mission as it stands today is not in its entirety the same structure that was finished in 1797, for in 1906 Bishop Granjon of Tucson undertook to restore and repair some parts of the building which had been falling into ruin as a result of a long period of rainy weather. With the exception of the old bullet-scarred facade and doorway, the whole structure was restored, extant portions were reinforced, fallen portions raised from the ground and the wall around the Mission rebuilt though in a lighter fashion than the original wall. It was felt that esthetic consideration should dominate the character of the wall, rather than the necessity of defense. Consequently the heaviness that had originally characterized it was modified somewhat. On the whole, however, the restoration was a faithful one, old outs and photographs being closely followed. The work was done entirely with Indian labor, with the materials found on the ground, and it is said to be impossible to distinguish the parts of the building which have been restored from the original.

Much of the interest of the old Mission lies in the fact that it was, of necessity, constructed of materials which the padres found at hand when the building was contemplated. Hence it is made entirely of baked adobe brick covered with white plaster.

The foundations are of boulders embedded in cement made on the site. They extend to an approximate depth of five feet below grade and about two feet above. The stone was obtained from the neighboring hills and was carried by the Indians to the building. The lime was made from limestone from one or several deposits in the immediate locality; no record having been found to date as to just where it was obtained.

The original floor was probably paved with brick similar to the brick used for walls and ceilings. A section of this floor

is said to exist under the modern wood floor of the east transept. The church above the foundations is entirely of burned adobe brick, measuring $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 inches in width, by 16 inches in length and 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. They were manufactured near the site under the direction of the architect, Ignacio Gaona and his brother, a brick mason. A decendent of the family is now living in Yuma, Arizona. The columns of the main facade, and the altars, are of specially molded brick, reinforced with a wood core running through the center of the column. These columns were covered with plaster which was molded and carved with a spoon-like tool. The beautifully proportioned dome climaxing the exterior as well as the interior of the structure, and the vaults are constructed of brick. They were built, without forms or centering, by projecting each succeeding header course in an arch or fan shaped form of construction, and were backed up with a rubble masonry fill where floors occurred over vaults.

Two belfry towers flanking the entrance, dominate the front of the Mission, the one on the right or east has never been finished. Tradition has it that the unfinished tower is a monument to one of the padres who fell and was killed before it was completed. Both towers at one time contained a chime of four bells each, but only three of the original set remain in the west tower. Another bell in the belfry of the mortuary chapel may have come from the church, but the inscription on this bell is undecipherable. One of the chime bells is from the lost set of the Mission of San Juan Bautista in California. The inscription reads S. JUAN BEVJTSTA, and was cast by a Peruvian. The second bell, though badly cast, carries the name of SAN PEDRO (Saint Peter) which checks with records of the church. The third bell was another poor job of casting in which the lettering is in reverse and when transposed reads: I.I. SERA XABYER A. A.D. 1807 or San Xavier, A.D. 1807. Between the two flanking towers is the facade which remains completely untouched since the day the finishing touches were put on it in 1797. Made entirely of baked adobe clay, the design is a curious one and the detail of the ornamentation is rather crude. Nevertheless, it is considered one of the most beautiful things of its kind in the Southwest.

The plaster for the church, so an old record runs, was left to "ripen" in a large pit dug for the purpose, while Gaona and his brother were working at Tumacacori. The plaster was a mixture of lime, milk, caliohi, and animal blood. The waterproof plaster finish used in the canales (roof spouts) with its soft, smooth glaze of burned Indian pottery, is of an unknown compound.

The frieze of the interior cornice is decorated in molded plaster with the cord of Saint Francis which encircles the church, having two tasselled ends hanging down on either side of the central niche of the main altar. The hem of the Franciscan vestment is also

a part of the frieze, having the traditional fringe of bells and pomegranates. (Exodus XXVIII, 33, 34, 45).

Woodwork throughout was pine, except for the main entrance doors, which were oak with a metal covering on the outside, and in the construction of the altar rail and pulpit where mesquite was used. There are records of mesquite trees forty feet high in the vicinity at the time of the building of the Mission.

Tradition has it that, the frescoes were painted by an "Artistic", (name unknown) of the college of Queretero, who was a pupil of Francisco Eduardo Tresfurrus, the Michael Angelo of Old Mexico. The marble effect of the cornice together with the "Dab" work on the piers, niches, and vaults was executed by the Indians, who introduced rabbits and other small animals in a naive manner in their work. For many years it was thought the vegetable coloring matter, brought to the padres by the Indians for the frescoes came from an unknown source, but recent research by the Smithsonian Institute has discovered that the colors came from the following substances:

Red, from the root of the Ocotillo; blue, from the pulpy sap of the saguaro cactus; brown and yellow were made from the first layer of skin under the bark of the Palo Verde tree; green, from the leaves of the sage; black, from the bean of the mesquite; boiling produces the degree of shade desired.

The smaller statutes were carved, on the job, of wood which was given a thin skin coat of plaster before being decorated. The larger ones were imported from Spain and are noted for having glass eyes in most cases. A few of these statues are only head and hands on a frame, and are designed to be dressed in silks or satins, such as the Immaculate Conception and the Mater Dolorosa. The latter wears a wedding dress, the gift of an Indian woman, that was donated some fifty years ago.

Ignacio Gaona, the architect, died before the completion of the church. This probably accounts for the name of Pedro Bojourquez appearing in an abbreviated form (Pedro Bejs) together with the date, A.D. 1797, on the Sacristy door. Bojourquez probably corresponded to a carpenter foreman or construction superintendent of the present day.

In 1690, under the leadership of Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, Jesuit pioneer and Missionary, the Jesuits began moving north from Sonora into what is now Arizona, gradually establishing a chain of Missions and visitas south of the Gila river. The most northerly mission in this chain was that of San Xavier del Bac. It was named by Father Kino for his patron saint, San Xavier, the Jesuit Apostle to the Indians. This name was retained by the Franciscans, although they changed the names of practically all the other missions under their direction. Father Kino had visited

the place many times before the building of a Mission was undertaken. At that time Bac was a fertile and well-watered area, supporting a large population. Bac is an Indian name the meaning of which is in some doubt. Probably it means "wet place" or "marshy ground". Father Kino began construction of the first San Xavier church on April 28, 1700, on a site about two miles northeast of the present site. The church was constructed of adobe brick with foundations of Texontle stone carried by the Indians from a little hill a quarter of a league away.

In the year 1767, Charles III expelled the Jesuits from the whole of the Spanish Empire, and by the same Royal order, the Franciscans were given charge of the Missions in this country. They assumed charge in 1768. Thus San Xavier came under the direction of Father Francisco Garces, O. F. M., but before the year was out, and when he lay sick in a neighboring "visita" the Apaches destroyed the Mission buildings. Four years later we find a fairly large church erected to replace those lost during the Indian raid. Father Garces' activities included extensive exploration as well as surveying a route to California, besides building a large church at a Mission established at the foot of "A" mountain, just west of the present city of Tucson. He erected the first chapel on the site of the present church. It was located in the rear of the present building, just west of the north gateway into the patio. He was killed by the Indians at Yuma, Arizona, in 1792.

Two Franciscan Fathers, successors to Father Garces, began the work on the present church, building, as is supposed by some authorities, upon the cruciform foundation plan laid out and partially completed by the Jesuits.

The next four years were disastrous ones. Royal Commissioners were temporarily placed in charge of the Missions, who took the opportunity of wasting and embezzling their accumulated wealth.

In 1768, before the Franciscans had taken over the Missions, Bac was again plundered by the Indians.

All the churches of Pimeria Alta of the period are described as of adobe, covered with wood, grass and earth, and meagerly equipped. Pimeria Alta was the name used by the Spanish and early Mexican Governors to designate the modern state of Sonora and that part of Arizona south of the Gila river. The Indians of the region were predominantly of the Pima tribe; hence the name. In the next few years, however, under the able leadership of Padre Francisco Garces (who, although young in years was affectionately known as the "old man") the Missions made great strides and regained much of their prosperity.

Mission life seems to have been peaceful for the next decade, but in 1810, with the beginning of the long series of upheavals in Mexico, the Mission again became less prosperous, and went into a decline from which it was never to emerge.

In 1813 the Spanish government ordered the secularization of the Missions and all Mission property reverted to the state, with the exception of a small parcel of land given to each adult male Indian. The Missions probably were little more than an ordinary parish church in the following decade.

The padres were hostile to the Mexican government which was established in 1823, and refusing to recognize it, were driven out. The peaceful papagos who lived in the Mission village, once more were subjected to periodic attacks by the Apaches. The Mission was completely deserted from 1828 to 1868 after Mexico won her independence, and seems to have been used by roving bands of Mexicans and Americans, though the Indians secreted the heavy silver communion service and vestments to protect them from vandals. Upon the retirement of the priests the statues and furnishings from the church were taken to the homes of the Indians in the locality, or buried in front of the church. The silver candle-sticks, vestments, etc., were confided to the care of Catholic families in Tucson. The Indians returned all the things in their possession when the church was reopened, but some of the valuable altar equipment was never returned, and there are side-boards in Tucson today that are resplendent with silver from the Mission.

In 1854, as a result of the Gadsden purchase, the territory in Arizona south of the Gila River passed into the possession of the United States. In 1857 priests again began to visit San Xavier regularly, making the trip from Tucson every two weeks. Agriculture seems to have completely died out at the Mission after the padres abandoned it. Today there is only a small Indian village of adobe huts and grass hickups in the vicinity.

In 1828 the last of the Spanish Franciscans left the Mission, and the order of Friars did not return to the administration of the Mission until 1911.

San Xavier became a Franciscan monastery in the latter part of 1939, which closed all but the church and school to female visitors.

The Mission withstood the earthquake of 1887, but a period of rainy weather caused much damage to the ceilings and walls.

Bishop Salpointe made four attempts to restore the Mission. A Jesuit Padre was first located at Bac for part of the year 1864.

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The second attempt induced a M^r. Vincent to open a school in 1866, which lasted a few months only. The third was a school under the sisters of Saint Joseph, which covered a period of three years from 1873 to 1876. Finally Mother Aguias, Sister Marsina and Sister Barbara were destined to teach the Indians of the Pueblo full forty years. The school today is still under the successors to these courageous nuns.

References:

Father Julian, Superior, San Xavier Mission;
Father Nicholas, San Xavier Mission;
Father Macia, deceased;
Father Stoner, Tucson, Arizona.



Trent Thomas,
Architect in Charge,
HABS, Southwest Unit.

Approved Nov 7, 1940.



Roy Place,
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